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MEMOIR

OF THE

BARON DE KALB,

READ AT THE MEETING

OF THE

Maryland Historical Society,

7th January, 1858,

By J. SPEAR SMITH.

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DE KALB.

Gentlemen:

The recent presentation to the Society of a fine portrait of the Baron de Kalb, offers a proper occasion for some notice of this distinguished officer of the Revolutionary War. And, it may not be the less appropriate, from his having been in command of the Maryland Line from 1780 until his death.

John, Baron de Kalb, Baron de Kalsbritt, &c. was born in 1732, near Nuremburg, in the dominions of Prussia. His parents were Protestants, and of some note among the noblesse of the country. They had it, therefore, in their power to give him a good education, and to imbue him with those high moral qualities, which ever distinguished his future life. At an early age he entered the service of France, as a cadet, in a German regiment. He rose by degrees to the rank of General of Brigade, and, in reward of his gallantry, was made a Knight of the Royal Order of Merit. Serving through the whole of the seven years war, and uniting a close study of the military art, with its practice in the field and in garrison, he became an accomplished soldier. The treaty of peace of 1763, put an end to his active duties and threw him into retirement.

This inactivity was not of long duration, as, soon after the date of the treaty, he was selected by the Duke de Choiseul, to visit America for the purpose of inquiring into

the military capabilities, political condition, and popular sentiment of the British Colonies. The confidence thus reposed in him, was a flattering manifestation of the reliance of that great statesman, on his talent and discretion, in the execution of so delicate a trust. It required zeal, secresy, perspicacity and fidelity. It seems to have been faithfully discharged by him. But, ample and accurate as no doubt were his investigations, they have never been made public, and are probably still buried in the archives of France. It is no unfair conjecture to suppose, that the Baron was fully cognizant of the patriotic opposition made in 1761 by Jame Otis to the famous "Writs of Assistance." That opposition was, for the period, as astounding in its fearless defiance of the crown, as it was eloquent and logical, in the argument. The report of this prompt resistance of lawless power, soon pervaded the colonies, and in its traverse, awakened every mind to anxious thought, and every heart, to stern self-reliance. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that, this bold movement was the beginning of the revolution. Not that Mr. Otis, or any other man caused it. The inbred devotion to liberty, common to all, was the real and dominating constituent of that happy result. Without it, there would have been no successful revolt. This ennobling sentiment came in with the Pilgrims of the East—with the companions of Smith—the followers of Penn—and the associates of Baltimore. As it came, so it continued, and when assailed, all banded for its defence.

These incipient discontents, with the ardent and unceasing discussions of them, would naturally make a vivid impression on a mind, so discerning as that of De Kalb. And the more so as, from a comparison of dates, he may have really witnessed, as the sequence of them, the meeting of the first Congress at New York in 1765.

The design of this convention being to bring about a union for the concentrated action of the colonies, imparted a still more threatening aspect to a dissatisfaction, now become so universal. It is probable, therefore, that he looked forward, with no little assurance, to the fruitful consequences that might result, from such grave events. Nor is it less likely that, knowing the far-reaching policy of De Choiseul,* he felt great satisfaction in noting down these very remarkable proceedings. But, prior to his return from this tour of investigation, the latter was driven from the post of prime minister of Louis XV. by the intrigues of the infamous Duke d'Aiguillon, and the influence of Madame du Barri, the King's mistress. And so little importance was attached to the mission of De Kalb, by a degraded and frivolous court, that he had infinite difficulty in obtaining even an audience of the new minister, to render an account of the information he had gathered. De Choiseul had been cautiously preparing to retaliate on England, the injuries she had inflicted on his country. D'Aiguillon, the new premier, was careless of every thing but the retention of the power, he had so ignobly acquired. The former, in retribution of the loss to France of her colonies, had been aiming to wrench from England her transatlantic possessions, whilst the latter was prostrating the honor of the realm and the dignity of the crown, in the sensual revels of an imbecile King, and in base sycophancy to a low-bred courtezan.

France being still at peace, and De Kalb freed from active public duties, he retired to a small estate which he possessed, near Versailles. There, in the midst of his family circle, he devoted himself to literary and agricul-

* Talleyrand said of the Duke—"Of all the men of our age, he possessed the greatest foresight, and as early as 1769 he felt assured of the separation of America from England." *Sur les Colonies.*

tural pursuits. In this seclusion he continued, until the conflict between Great Britain and her colonies had become so animated, as to arouse all his feelings in their behalf.

The profoundest mortification was felt by the French army, at the disgraceful stipulations of the treaty of 1763. They had shorn France to the quick. Whole provinces were wrested from her sceptre, and her glory in arms, was deeply stained. England had not only seized the Canadas, and occupied her insular colonies, but had nearly annihilated her navy, in repeated victories. By the treaty, the magnificent empire she had built up in America, was surrendered. Acquisitions, stretching from the Atlantic to the sources of the Mississippi, were forever lost. These vast territories, with the valley of that great river, to its embouchure in the Gulf of Mexico, gave her the signal stratagetical advantage, of almost encircling the sea-board colonies of her enemy. An attitude so commanding, ceased with the annexation to the British crown, of the French North American domain.

The French people also, were as indignant as was the army, at these national disasters. Canada was dear to them, not only from religious sympathy, but from the family ties which connected its inhabitants with them, in the most affectionate relations. There was scarce a province in France, unrepresented in this cherished abode. The first European settlers in these northern regions were exclusively French. No other had preceded them, nor had any other, up to the war of 1756, ever interfered with their happy and peaceful homes. Their clergy had diligently ministered to the wants of their flocks, and with a zeal worthy the best days of Christianity, had penetrated the distant wilds, bearing with them the meekness and purifying influences of the gospel. Cov-

ered with productive farms and thriving villages, French laws, habits and associations pervaded the whole colony. The sacrifice of such a possession might justly arouse the strongest feeling of indignation throughout France, and well excite her people to grasp any opportunity for its recovery, or for visiting the fullest retribution on the despoiler. Hence it was that, at a later period, both the army and people so enthusiastically sided with us, and that the timely and powerful aid of their government, was so liberally extended to the revolted British colonies.

His visit to these colonies, had made the Baron de Kalb intimately acquainted with their resources and means of defence, and the indomitable character of their people. Sympathizing with them in their resistance to oppression, whilst participating ardently in their repinings, excited by the ruinous peace of 1763, he was foremost in the proffer of his assistance. His zeal in the cause seems to have admitted of no procrastination, and to have led him to an early interview with the American agents, Dr. Franklin and Silas Deane. After several conferences he finally come to an agreement with them.

Among the important objects of the agency of these gentlemen, in Paris, was that of securing the services of capable officers, not only for commands, but to assist, with their experience, in training our undisciplined levies for the field. In November 1776, the Baron signed his contract with Mr. Deane, as well for himself as for Capt. Du Bois Martin* and a few others, he had the privilege of nominating. His engagement was to serve the United States under the orders of Congress, and in return, to have the rank of Major General, with its incidents; his aides to be Majors. The contract being executed, he at

*MS. Memoir of Du Bois Martin, Port Folio, No. 9, Md. Hist. Soc.

once entered on the task of obtaining other defenders of the American cause, from the ranks of the French army. Among those who, at the time were entertaining the same desire of uniting in the contest, was the Marquis De Lafayette, the most renowned, and the most important. Though strongly opposed by his family and his friends, he yet, at a conference with De Kalb, came to his final decision. His agreement with Mr. Deane was signed in December, being one month later than that of the Baron. He also was to have the rank of Major General.

As France had not yet declared war, all the movements of these officers had to be conducted with the utmost secrecy. Not the least of their difficulties was to get out of France either by land or sea, so closely were they watched by the British Embassador, and their own authorities. They could not openly charter a vessel, nor could they embark at any of the French ports. Capt. Dubois Martin seems to have been the efficient agent, who, by his activity and boldness, overcame all impediments. At the time, he was a Captain of Infantry of a Regiment stationed at St. Domingo, but had previously been in the French Navy. By means of his brother, who was in the civil service, he had an interview with the Marquis, and then solved the difficulty, by proposing that the latter should supply the means of purchasing a vessel. This proposal was accepted without hesitation, and Du Bois Martin empowered to make the purchase. This, as he says, "I accomplished that very night before I slept." The vessel being equipped, the gallant officers who were to sail in her to our shores had the good fortune, through many perils, and in various disguises, to elude their pursuers, and to make a speedy and safe embarkation. They sailed from the small Spanish port of Passage in March 1777, and after a tedious voyage, arrived at Winyaw Bay, in

South Carolina, in the following June. It is probable the vessel was commanded by Du Bois Martin, as he says in his memoir, "The perfect success of the enterprise of course afforded, me great delight. In the month of June, I landed the Marquis and his suite of officers near Charleston." He further adds, we were pursued, "by boats sent to arrest us, by the Governor of Bordeaux—our answer to our pursuers was, that we would throw into the sea, the first man who attempted to board us." The reception of these officers by the people of Charleston, was so gratifying, and indeed, enthusiastic as to have largely added to the satisfaction, they felt, in having undertaken so gallant an adventure. But, more important matters than cordial greetings, and brilliant fêtes, were before them, and after a brief sojourn, they took their departure for the north.

On their arrival at Philadelphia, Congress, after some painful delays, ratified the appointment of the Marquis, to the rank of Major General, on the last of July. This enabled him to be earlier in the field than De Kalb, who encountered still greater difficulty. He did not receive his commission until the 15th of September. It was, however, antedated, so as to be cotemporaneous with that of the Marquis. Gen. Conway, then a Brigadier, warmly opposed the appointment of the former, urging that he was a new man, had seen no service here, was his inferior in the French army, and therefore, should not now be made to outrank him. But, Congress, feeling bound to redeem the pledges given by its agents abroad, turned a deaf ear to the complaints of this turbulent and conceited officer, and in the end, fulfilled the compact between Mr. Deane and the Baron. From that moment, until his death, he devoted himself zealously, to the responsible charges entrusted to him.

Early in October, sanctioned by the authority of Congress, he applied to the Commander in Chief, for active service. But, as no vacancy existed, all the divisions of the army having their chiefs, it was found impossible to accede to his wish. After the fall of Fort Mifflin, in November, he was sent, with Generals Knox and St. Clair, by Washington, to decide on the expediency of retaining possession of Fort Mercer, at Red Bank, on the Jersey Shore, and of thus being enabled to keep the enemy's fleet in check, or of withdrawing the troops from a post, they had so long, and so bravely defended. In their report, they advised the retention of the position, and that it should be strengthened, by an additional force. This was done, and the whole command entrusted to General Greene.

During the same month he was a member of the Council of General Officers, to which was submitted the question of attacking, or of beleaguering the enemy, in Philadelphia. It was decided that the strength of the British defences, stretching from the Schuykill to the Delaware, was too formidable, to admit of a successful assault, and that the American army was not in sufficient force to besiege such extended lines. A siege also, was the less promising, from the access, in the rear, to the river which the enemy enjoyed, for obtaining his supplies. Both of these plans were abandoned. In the vote of four, for an attack, and eleven against it, the Baron, always remarkable for his prudence, took his place with the latter.

He is next found in a situation which bid fair for active service, and which was every way congenial to his feelings. A projèt for an attack on Canada, was, without the sanction of Washington, hastily formed in February, 1778. Lafayette was ordered by Congress to lead the

invading force, of which Conway was to be one of the Generals. There being no other of higher rank, detailed for that service, he would necessarily, have been next in command to the Marquis. The latter however, soon disappointed this ambitious device, by insisting on having De Kalb, assigned to the very responsible post, so artfully obtained by Conway. But, the ill-digested scheme fell through, from a sheer want of an adequate force, and of sufficient resources. Generals Lafayette and De Kalb were, therefore, ordered to return immediately to Head Quarters, with the few troops they found at Albany.

In May, the army being still at Valley Forge, and the British in Philadelphia, another council of war was convened to again decide whether an attack should be attempted. The objections to it, which existed on the previous occasion, having undergone no change, it was unanimously advised, to remain on the defensive and wait for events. On the 18th June, however, the enemy having evacuated the City, and crossed the Delaware, Gen. Washington was enabled to take the field, and to commence offensive operations.

During the campaign of the last year, 1778, the Maryland and Delaware regiments, which always acted in one body, were under the command of Major General Sullivan, who being detached to the north, that duty devolved on Gen. Smallwood. The campaign of 1779, was one of stratagetic movements and combinations, rather than of conflict, between the belligerents, each one aiming to out-general the other, and thus, to gain the vantage ground.

In March, 1780, we find De Kalb at the head of the troops which defended the lines, from Elizabethtown to Amboy, and in April, being put in command of the

Maryland Division, he was ordered to the South. When these orders were received, the Division was at Morristown, but no time was permitted to elapse, before its march was begun. It was composed, as usual of the Maryland and Delaware battalions. Throughout the war, they acted as one body, and wherever the storm of battle raged fiercest, or the deadly strife was the most desperate and sanguinary, there were they ever foremost. To be selected for the command of such men was a high honor, one too, for which De Kalb was deeply grateful, and which he was always proud to acknowledge.

The long journey from New Jersey to South Carolina, was made on foot, with the exception of the passage from Elkton, to Petersburg, in Virginia. The two brigades, one under Smallwood, and the other, under Gist, had not the satisfaction of passing through Baltimore, so urgent was the state of affairs in the South. Thus, the pleasure was denied them, of being welcomed by that genial hospitality, for which she has ever been distinguished. All classes would have vied with each other in tendering to them, the most affectionate attentions. They were not only brethren in patriotism, but really so, from the more endearing ties of kindred. The Legislature of the State however, made liberal appropriations, for the comfort of both officers and men, whose spirit was thus cheered on, to the endurance of the dangers and hardships before them. In their tedious march, they were subjected to unceasing difficulties, as well from want of food, as from a scarcity of the means of transportation, in a thinly settled and wasted country. These became the greater, as their distance from Petersburg increased, and on their arrival at Hillsborough, in N. Carolina, it was necessary to halt for a few days, to restore the vigor of the men. It was hoped too that, during this delay, many of the

militia of N. Carolina and Virginia, who had been aroused to renewed activity, by the advent of De Kalb, would reach the camp.

The Baron was not entirely disappointed in these expectations, and having refreshed his troops, he moved on towards South Carolina. At Deep River, where he arrived on the 6th July, he was overtaken by Gen. Gates, who had been appointed by Congress, not by Washington, to the chief command, in the South. The success at Saratoga, had given him a high repute, for military genius, and the most unbounded confidence was reposed in his ability, by the country. Not so, however, by those who knew him better. De Kalb received him with all the military honors, due to his rank, and handed over to him the command of the men, he had so well conducted, through intense sufferings, to the scene of action. When the Baron was chosen by Washington, the South was under the command of Gen. Lincoln, to whose aid the Maryland division was detached. But, should any untoward event displace the latter, De Kalb would necessarily occupy the vacant post. The capitulation of Charleston, in May, caused Lincoln to return to the North, and that event, for which the prudence of Washington had prepared, resulted in the command devolving on the Baron. Gates however, succeeded in counteracting the effects of this forecast, and of these effective precautions, of the commander in chief. The latter, it was well known, would have given the preference to Gen. Greene, should Congress determine to confide the Southern Department, to some other than De Kalb. Gates had been for some time, in fact, making the most zealous efforts to obtain this honorable position. It would thwart Washington, minister to his own ambition, and, from the imperfect means of intercommunication of the period,

render him nearly independent of the authority of one, to whose high place, he enviously aspired, and to supplant whom, he had entered into the cabal of Conway and others. In a letter which he addressed to a South Carolina member of Congress, he invited earnest attention to the sufferings, and the claims to protection of the South, and indicated the means, by which relief could be afforded. This letter was read in Congress, and with other appliances, led to his being commissioned by that body, to the grave, and responsible duties, for which he was so ill qualified, and which would have been so much better discharged, by the general he displaced.

The main objects of this expedition were—to reinforce Lincoln—to give heart to the whigs—to repress the tories, and to rally around it, the armed men of Virginia and North Carolina, whilst such a display would re-invigorate the partisan corps of Sumpter, Marion, and Pickens. In the mean time, if Lincoln's command were broken up, it should encounter no useless risk, that might destroy this plan, nor should it strike a blow, unless it could be done, with telling effect, taking care to strain every nerve, to harass or check the aggressor, by surprises, cutting off convoys, and by all those annoyances, which damp the ardor of an enemy, and demoralize an invading foe. With these salutary views, ever present in the cautious, and well trained mind of De Kalb, he was making his slow, but prudent advances. The enemy being at Camden, under Lord Rawdon, he had determined to make a circuitous march from Deep River, through a region where his men could be well supplied; and with that aim, he was preparing to establish magazines and hospitals. By pursuing this course, he would have come down, on the flank of the enemy, brought his column, well conditioned into the field, whilst its strength would be increased, by

the reinforcements which would be daily joining his standard. To these advantages must be added the very great one, of the improvement in the discipline, and consequent steadiness of the militia, by a longer association with the regular troops. It was an admirable design, worthy of all praise, and if it had not been, in the end, attended by brilliant achievements, it certainly never could have been visited by the overwhelming disasters which an opposite course inflicted. Had the original plan of the campaign been adhered to, the brave sons of Maryland and Delaware would not have fallen a sacrifice to inflated vanity and consummate negligence.

As soon as Gates assumed the command, he announced his intention to march, in as direct a road as possible, to Camden. All the officers remonstrated against this rash step, urging the impracticability of the intervening country, its utter barrenness, and the debilitating effects on the men, of such an exposure,—that they would be worn down, from want of food, and thus reach the enemy's post, enfeebled and dispirited by exhaustion and sickness. The Adjutant General, O. H. Williams, presented these objections, with all the force of his great ability and eminent soldiership. The Virginia cavalry officers also, begged him to delay but a few days, in order that their men might join them, and thus, have an available force of horse added to his command. He obstinately refused, expecting to find the enemy greatly his inferior in numbers, and saying that Armand's troop would suffice. It consisted of but sixty men. He reached the camp on the 25th July, and put the army en route, on the 27th—merely occupying these two days, in reviewing the troops, and in issuing orders, for their departure. On the 13th of August they encamped at Rugely's Mills, or Clermont, and as had been foreseen, the men were reduced in effi-

ciency, by hunger,* fatigue and dysentery. Here he received advices from Gen. Sumpter, with a request for a reinforcement of his small band, to enable him to capture a British convoy, on its way to Camden. Gates, without the least hesitation, complied, and detached four hundred men and two pieces of artillery, under Col. Woolford of Maryland. One hundred of these men were regulars. This was another false step, for, on the eve of assailing the enemy, his whole force should have been kept well together, in order to meet the varied contingencies of a conflict, and the more so, as the number of his adversaries was only conjectural. Moreover, if he proved victorious, the convoy would, necessarily, have fallen into his hands, and if defeated, it would, as surely, be recaptured should Sumpter have succeeded. So, it turned out, having been retaken by Tarleton, after its seizure by Sumpter, with the loss also, of the greater part of Woolford's men.

As soon as Lord Rawdon got wind of the approach of Gates, he drew in all his outposts, strengthened his defences, with redoubts, and awaited the assault. But, being joined by Lord Cornwallis, with a strong reinforcement, they determined to assume the offensive. Their army numbered full three thousand men, most of them veterans, but all well enured to discipline, and to battle, having also, a strong body of cavalry, under Tarleton, and six heavy cannon. Except a body of North Carolinians, they were all regulars, and even this battalion had served so long, as to have become equal to their associates.

The morning report of Adjutant General Williams, puts the American army at three thousand and fifty men, of whom more than one-half were militia, and the larger portion of these were now, for the first time, in presence of

* "It occurred to some, that the hair powder, which remained in their bags, would thicken soup, and it was actually applied."—Williams' Narrative.

an enemy. To these must be added seven pieces of artillery and the handful of horse under Lt. Col. Armand. Thus, numerically, the adversaries were nearly equal. In their qualifications for battle, there was the greatest disparity. Viewing them in this light, the Americans were outnumbered in the proportion of two to one, with the disadvantage also, of a vast inferiority in cavalry.

Gen. Gates seemed to be under the strong conviction that Lord Rawdon was much too weak, to withstand him,—that it was too late for him to r eceive any succor—and that, an undoubted conquest, was to crown him with fresh laurels. He took things as they appeared—believed they could undergo no change—and did not stoop to inform himself, of what was transpiring beyond his own camp. Vain glorious, and inflated with the triumph over Burgoyne, he had persuaded himself, as well as others, that he was a great martial chieftain, and could rely, exclusively, on his own superior genius. A resort to the experience of his subordinates, much less to more humble sources of information, was superfluous to a leader of such military sagacity. De Kalb, on the contrary, advised their continuance at Clermont,—to strengthen a naturally good position, and to wait, at least, for more reliable intelligence, than they now had. And, if attacked, it would better suit the composition of the American army, to be on the defensive than to stake a combat, in open field, on a force so largely consisting of raw militia. Besides, the enemy may have been reinforced, and if so, might possibly, have such an excess, as to render our attempts either useless, or fatal to the expedition. Most of the officers concurred in this reasoning. It was unheeded, and the advance was ordered to take place, at ten, on the night of the 15th. The design was, by a forced march, to take

the enemy by surprise, to fall on him at dawn, and achieve an easy victory.

Cornwallis, prompted by a like motive, left Camden, about the same hour, to beat up the quarters of the Americans, at Clermont. The advanced guards of the two armies met in the dark, at midnight, and after a skirmish of some minutes, fell back on their respective lines. In this affair, Col. Porterfield* of Virginia, was wounded, and afterwards made prisoner. Both generals determined to pause until day-light, to form their order of battle. And now, to his utter astonishment, Gates learnt from a prisoner, that the enemy was commanded by Cornwallis, in person, and that he had brought with him from Charleston, a strong addition to the detachment, at Camden. This led to another council of war, in which it was rashly concluded to "fight." This gallant, but imprudent decision, failed to receive the approval of De Kalb, Williams, and others of the Continental line, they preferring to return to the defensible ground at Clermont,† and the more so, as the intended surprise had entirely failed. When Williams summoned De Kalb to the council, the Baron said,‡ "Well, has the General given you orders to retreat the army." A stolid indifference to such opinions, being clearly manifested, preparations were made, and by both parties, for the eventful struggle.

Lord Cornwallis formed his alignment, by stationing on his right wing, a corps of light infantry, with the 23d and 33d regiments, headed by Lt. Col. Webster. Lord Rawdon was assigned to the left, with the volunteers of

* A brave and excellent officer.

† "One hundred men there, I am told, would have defended the pass, against the whole British army."—*Gov. Nash of N. C. to Gen. Washington.*—Sparks.

‡ Williams' Narrative.

Ireland, the infantry of the Legion, a battalion of the N. Carolina regiment, and four pieces of artillery. The 71st regiment, with two field pieces, formed the reserve, part covering the right, and the other, the left of the array, with Tarleton's horse, in the rear of the whole.*

Gen. Gates made his arrangements, by posting the 2d Maryland Brigade, including the Delaware contingent, on the right, under Gen. Gist. The Virginia militia were placed on the left, commanded by Gen. Stevens, whilst those of N. Carolina, led by Gen. Casswell, formed the centre, the greater part of the artillery occupying the road. The 1st Maryland Brigade, under Gen. Smallwood, constituted the reserve, including Armand's cavalry. The extreme flanks of both armies rested on swamps. De Kalb took his station with the right, Gates being some 200, yards in the rear, to overlook the combatants, and to issue his orders.*

The mere statement of the American and British dispositions, shows the radical defects of the former, and the superiority of the latter. The enemy's front was strong, not only in the qualifications of the troops, but in the stations of the artillery, as well as, in the adaptation of the reserve to every emergency. Regulars on the right and left, a compact centre, an efficient reserve, with a strong body of horse, to dash at the opposing ranks, the instant they were thrown into disorder. The only part of the American front that had any strength, was the right, and this, for a time, bore the whole brunt of the conflict. Even, here, Gen. Gist had, during the battle, to repair an omission, which as he supposed, was left to his discretion,† by Gen. Gates, and he therefore ordered a Delaware company to fill up an exposed interval. The

* Official Reports, Md. Journal, 1780. † Gist Papers, vol. 2, Md. H. S.

centre was weak, the left more so, and too much of the artillery seemed to be massed in the road. Had the feeble left been sustained by more of the field pieces, or, had it been composed of Smallwood's brigade, which constituted the reserve, the result might, and probably would have been, more propitious to the patriot cause.

The two armies being thus drawn up, the battle began at dawn, on the 16th August, by the interchange of discharges of their artillery. Williams, to inspirit the militia of the left, led forward a body of skirmishers, in its front. He hoped also, by this step, to check the enemy, and by it, to still further encourage these untried men, lest their want of steadiness, under fire, should prove fatal to the day. The effort was fruitless. The British right, with loud shouts, advanced rapidly, and pouring in a brisk fire, so appalled the militia of the American left, that they broke, threw down their muskets, and fled, taking with them, all the N. Carolina militia, except four hundred men, under Col. Dixon. These bravely stood their ground, for sometime. De Kalb now ordered up Smallwood, with his reserve, to fill the gap, and unite with Gist. But, his numbers were not sufficient, to completely extend to the swamp. Still, he arrested the onward course of the enemy, and the whole line now became engaged. Reduced as was the American army by the flight of the militia, yet it never flinched, but contested every inch of ground with heroic courage. Borne back by the unequal pressure of the foe, they as often rallied and caused them, in return, to recede. It was now a strife of the bayonet, fighting hand to hand, man to man, in this desperate conflict. Never, on any field, was there a greater display of indomitable fortitude, and chivalric bearing. De Kalb, still bent on success, re-formed his shattered ranks, for another assault

on the British line, now reinforced by their reserve. All rallied to the call, and placing himself in their front, he led on that last, and fearful attack, by which he hoped, if not to gain the mastery, to at least inflict such a loss to the enemy, as would secure his retreat. Well did they breast the serried ranks of their adversaries, and well too, was the work of death, done by the bayonets of Maryland. But, in this great crisis of their fate, De Kalb fell, at the head of his devoted followers, pierced with eleven wounds. Despite even this sad event, Smallwood's brigade, and Gist still maintained the unequal struggle, when Cornwallis, amazed at so obstinate a resistance, ordered his light infantry to push round the American left, and thence to its rear. And seeing that, his opponents were without cavalry, he instantly brought up his own. It promptly obeyed the order, and at this eventful moment, made a furious charge on the Americans, worn, and staggering under the unceasing blows of overpowering numbers. Now, did the refusal of Gates to await the assemblage of his own cavalry, tell with fatal effect. The proposed delay would have averted the ruinous discomfiture which ensued. For, had our gallant mounted men, led on by Col. Washington, been in the field, Tarleton would have been bravely met, and held at bay, during which the desperate onslaught of De Kalb, might have changed the fate of the day. Infantry and dragoons thus, came crushing down on the fragments of the American line, and threw it into inextricable confusion. Nearly surrounded by their opponents, and with no corps of horse to shield them, from that of the enemy, or to cover a retreat, it was impossible for them to reform, or to retire in a body, from this terrible melée. It became, from necessity, a *sauve qui peut*, each man shifting for himself. Fortunately, the adjoining morasses, to

which numbers of them retired, afforded shelter, from the brutal troopers of Tarleton.

Generals Gates, Stevens and Casswell did all in their power, to rally the flying militia, but in vain, and they with Armand's horse, were swept along, by the retreating tide. Gates, not knowing that De Kalb was still battling for victory, and supposing the whole force had fled, retired to Charlotte, some sixty miles from the scene. The air indeed, was so still, and the smoke so dense, as to shut out all that was passing. Thus ended the battle of Camden, as wrong in its conception, as it was defective in military arrangements, yet, ever memorable for the signal gallantry of the Maryland and Delaware lines. It was the most disastrous of the whole war. Artillery, small arms, ammunition, baggage wagons, with their contents, fell, without exception, into the hands of the enemy. All was lost, save the honor of the heroic sons of Maryland and Delaware, whose prowess extorted, even from Britons, the meed of praise. That the regulars should have so firmly held their ground, after being abandoned, by the whole of the left, and centre, is well entitled to remembrance. When an army is marshalled for battle, if any important section of the front, take flight, it is not unusual for the whole to be fatally intimidated. It is rare that such an event, does not create so much want of confidence, as to lead to despair, and a consequent participation in the panic and dissolution of the whole force. It is still more rare for them to keep their ranks, when left to their fate, by so large a body, as two-thirds of the whole. So argued Gen. Gates, but these brave men never seemed, for a moment, to think even of a retreat. On the contrary, though their reserve was broken through, by the fleeing militia, they yet did not falter, or give way. The reserve also, immediately closed up,

sternly advanced, and drove back the enemy, who were coming exultingly on, supposing there was nothing left, but to pursue and slay the runaways. No less praise is due to Gist's brigade for its valor, in continuing the fight, when so deserted, than to the reserve under Smallwood, when so broken by the militia, for its steadiness, and its prompt junction, with their heroic comrades.

Nor should it be forgotten that, on this bloody field were not only Smallwood, and Gist, and Williams, but a Howard, a Gunby, Hall, Giles, Anderson, Winder, Gassaway, Reid, Beale, Duval, Handy, Somerville, Kilty, Nelson, Brice, Jamison, Dorsey, Hanson, Norris, and many others of Maryland, with Vaughan, Kirkwood, Willson, McKennan, Patton, Rhoads, &c. of Delaware.

With the exception of prisoners, the loss on both sides, was nearly equal, though were we to credit the English account, that on our part, was much the greater. Nothing is more common than to exaggerate the force, and the losses of an enemy, after a battle. The British commander has, in no way, deviated from such examples. In his official letter he makes two statements of the strength of the Americans. In the first, he rates it at full six thousand men, and in the second, he reduces it to five thousand, whereas, as has been shown, it was, in fact, but three thousand and fifty. Our killed and wounded are, in the same spirit, put down at nine hundred, when in reality, our loss, including militia and prisoners, did not exceed three hundred and fifty, of whom, more than a third of the wounded, subsequently recovered.* His

* Among other misstatements of Cornwallis, are those of the death of Gen. Gregory, and the capture of Gen. Rutherford. Their names are not mentioned in the American official report of the killed, wounded and prisoners.—*See note A at the end.* And, Gov. Nash, of N. C. writes that they, with others enumerated by him, "are safe."

own loss he reports to be only two hundred and twenty-four, in killed, wounded and missing. In opposition to this, we have the acknowledgment of a British officer that, "they had seven hundred killed and wounded, either mortally, or so as to disable them in future."* The probabilities are however, as has been stated, that there was but little disparity, in the losses of the two parties, though it is possible, the admission of a British officer may be nearer the truth. But, admitting an equality only, there could be no stronger evidence, than it adduces, of the devotedness, spirit, and self-possession of the American soldiery, with such large odds of a veteran force, to contend with. It is not easy to state the precise number of the American regulars who fought the battle of Camden. About fourteen hundred left Morristown, and it is no unfair presumption, from the hardships of the march, the scarcity of food, and its unwholesomeness, that not more than eleven hundred were fit for duty, on the day of battle. Even on the night march from Clermont, many of the men, afflicted with dysentery, were compelled to quit the ranks, as is mentioned by Williams. Now, if the one hundred regulars, detached under Woolford, be deducted, there were left but one thousand, to contend with the three thousand of the enemy. Many writers give but nine hundred, to the Americans.

Immediately after the battle, Lord Cornwallis returned to Charleston, after directing Lord Rawdon to hold the post, at Camden, and to fortify its front, the flanks being covered by the Wateree and a deep creek. And, so stunned were they, by the severe blow they had received, as to have been disabled from advancing further, northward.

* Maryland Journal. Gov. Nash makes their loss 500.

This consequence, dearly as it was bought, was attended with others, of no small advantage. The enemy were deterred from overrunning North, as they had done, South Carolina and Georgia, and time was gained, for reuniting the scattered remains of the army, at Hillsborough. In a few weeks, nearly seven hundred of the regulars, and many of the militia, were reassembled, and in good condition, to receive Gen. Greene, who was promptly despatched to supersede Gen. Gates. When the former therefore, reached the South, he had it in his power, to take the field, and begin that career of glory, which placed him, second only, to Washington. Do not these results give a sufficient response, to the remark, which has been made, that the regulars fought too long, at Camden? If they had fled with the militia, such would have been the confusion of a frantic crowd, as to have denied all order, and to have rendered the carnage, inevitably greater, whilst those who escaped this fate, must have been made prisoners. As it was, the stern resistance of the Continentals, saved the militia, and a goodly number of their own body made a successful retreat. It was better then, to stand up to the brave encounter, as well for their own manhood, as for the good of their country.

On the fall of De Kalb, his aide Col. Dubuysson, raising him in his arms, and showing him to the surrounding enemies, stated his rank, and implored them to spare him. In thus exposing himself to save his chief, he also, was wounded, and made prisoner. Whilst prostrate and disabled, the British soldiers, with their characteristic cruelty* were still thrusting their bayonets, into the

* The barbarities practised by the British army, on the Americans, were of ruthless severity. These cruelties, were not inflicted on the soldiery alone, but were extended to non-combatants in town and country, with rare excep-

fallen General. And, in their savage greed for plunder, they even stripped him, to his shirt.* The entreaties of Dubuysson, at last, prevailed, and after the fell excitement of the strife had subsided, with unwonted humanity on their part, they extended to him, every succour in their power. In a few days however, he expired, having on his death bed, dictated a valedictory letter to Generals Smallwood and Gist, intending it also, for the officers and soldiers of his division. As the substance only, of this letter has been quoted by the historians of the revolution, it is but right, to give it, in full, on this occasion.

CHARLOTTE *August* 26th, 1780.†

Dear Generals,—Having received wounds in the action of the 16th instant, I was made prisoner, with the Honorable Major General the Baron De Kalb, with whom I served as Aid-De-Camp and friend, and had an opportunity of attending that great and good officer, during the short time he languished with eleven wounds, which proved mortal on the third day.

It is with particular pleasure I obey the Baron's last commands, in presenting his most affectionate compliments to all the officers and men of his division. He expressed the greatest satisfaction in the testimony given by the British army, of the bravery of his troops; and he was charmed with the firm opposition they made to superior force, when abandoned by the rest of the army. The gallant behaviour of the Delaware regiments, and the Companies of Artillery attached to the Brigades, afforded him infinite pleasure. And the exemplary con-

tions. So great was their excess that, it was said in Europe;—"England has revived in America, the ferocity of the Goths, and the brutal ravages of the most savage of the invaders of Rome."

* Williams' Narrative. † Dubuysson was now on parole.

duct of the whole Division, gave him an endearing sense of the merit of the troops he had the honor to command.

I am, Dear Generals, with regard and respect, your most obedient humble servant,

Le Chevalier Dubuysson, *Lt. Col.*

To the Brigadiers Smallwood *and* Gist.*

The Baron De Kalb was six feet in height, erect, and well-proportioned, with a manly face, and an agreeable expression. In his habits he was remarkably abstemious, and had trained himself to the endurance of the severest hardships. Respected, and beloved by his troops, he was distinguished for his sagacity in council, a wary circumspection in his preparations, and for his fearless chivalry in battle. He was well read in the best English, German, and French authors, speaking these languages with fluency. He married Anne Elizabeth Van Robais, by whom he had three children, two sons and one daughter. The elder of the sons perished on the revolutionary scaffold of France, in 1793. The second, the Baron Elie De Kalb, who served with distinction in the French army, married Elise Signard, and had two children, a son who died in early life, and a daughter, Leonore. She married the Viscount d'Alzac, and they are now residing at Milou near Paris. They have five sons. Anne Marie Caroline, the daughter of Major General Baron De Kalb, married Jean Luc Geymuller, a Swiss officer in the French army. They left three sons and one daughter. Thus the name of De Kalb is extinct, the descendants bearing the names of D'Alzac and Geymuller.

In Congress, on 14th October 1780, it was—

Resolved, That a Monument be erected to the Memory

* Maryland Journal, 1780.

of the late Major General the Baron De Kalb, in the City of Annapolis in the State of Maryland, with the following inscription:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
THE BARON DE KALB,
Knight of the Royal Order of Military Merit,
Brigadier of the Armies of France,
And
Major-General in the Service of the United States of America.
Having served with Honor and Reputation for three years,
He gave a last and glorious Proof of his Attachment to the
Liberties of Mankind and the Cause of America,
In the Action near Camden, in the State of South Carolina,
On the 16th of August, 1780;
Where, leading on the Troops of the Maryland and
Delaware Lines against Superior Numbers,
And animating them by his Example to Deeds of Valour,
He was pierced with many Wounds, and
On the 19th following expired, in the 48th Year of his Age,
The Congress of the United States of America
In Gratitude to his Zeal, Services, and Merit,
Have erected this Monument.

It is painful to know that this resolution has never been carried into effect. For this omission, on the part of our revolutionary ancestors, when we remember their destitution, their anxious moments, and the countless difficulties claiming their daily attention, there is much of apology. But, for their descendants no such exemption can be invoked. Ample opportunity, and leisure, with no stinted means, have been at their bidding. The ungrateful neglect still exists, though the attention of the Federal Government has been repeatedly invited to the discharge of this patriotic duty. It should be ever cherished as a sacred bequest from patriot sires, to be religiously fulfilled, by their more opulent descendants.

His remains however, are not unhonored. They were interred at Camden, and the citizens of South Carolina, have erected over them, a beautiful structure, recounting his heroism, and devotion to the cause, he so generously espoused. It is a monument, suited to its purpose, ennobling its authors, whilst transmitting to after times, an apt exemplar of their patriotism, and his worth.* It is still more endeared, from the corner stone having been laid in 1825, by Lafayette, the companion in arms, and devoted friend of De Kalb.

When the Cincinnati Society was formed, in 1783, diplomas of membership, with the appropriate badges of the Institution, were granted to the sons of De Kalb, and were, most gratefully, acknowledged by them.

In the official despatch of Gen. Gates to Gen. Washington, of the 30th of August, from Hillsborough, he says: "Too much honor cannot be paid by Congress, to the memory of the Baron De Kalb. He was every thing an excellent officer should be, and in the cause of the United States, he has sacrificed his life."

Washington also, bears testimony to his worth.—writing to Lt. Col. Dubuysson, on the 10th October 1780, he thus expresses himself: "I sincerely lament the loss of the Baron De Kalb. The manner in which he died, fully justified the opinion which I have ever entertained of him, and will endear his memory to the country." So likewise, in his reply, dated 25th May, 1791, to a congratulatory address of the inhabitants of Camden, he says: "Your grateful remembrance of that excellent friend and gallant officer, the Baron De Kalb, does honor to the goodness of your hearts. With your regrets, I mingle mine for his loss, and to your praise I join the tribute of my esteem for his memory."†

* See Note B. at the end.

† See Note C. at the end.

There were certain arrears of pay, due to him at the time of his death, and in 1819, his heirs petitioned Congress for their liquidation. By the urgent advocacy of Mr. Lowndes of S. Carolina, a grant of some land in Ohio, was awarded to them. From their ignorance of the laws of the country, they found, when endeavoring to turn this grant to account, that the land had been sold for taxes. All attempts to recover it were fruitless. They consequently, at a later period, again appealed to the bounty of Congress. Just as these claims proved to be, after undergoing the severest scrutiny, they were yet slurred over, from session to session, until 1855. An act was then passed, which provides that, "in consideration of the claims, services, and sacrifices of the late Major General Baron De Kalb in the war of the revolution," there be paid to his children and heirs the sum of sixty-six thousand and ninety dollars, and seventy-six cents. The Legislature of Maryland had strongly urged the payment of these claims, and the Hon. Henry May, one of her representatives in Congress, was mainly instrumental in having her behests fulfilled.

However tardy, this act of justice, it nevertheless, affords a gratifying evidence of the integrity, as well as, of the gratitude of the country. And, may we not indulge the hope that, a no less laudable sentiment, will yet erect the monument decreed by those, from whom we have received our independence, our liberties, and an empire republic?

NOTES.

NOTE A.

"List of Continental Officers killed, captivated, wounded, and missing, in the action of the 16th and 18th* August, 1780."

Killed.

The Honorable Major-General the Baron de Kalb.
Capt. Williams, 6th Maryland Regiment.
Capt. Duvall, 2d do.
Lieutenant Donovan, 6th do.
Lieut: and Adjutant Coleman, Artillery.

Wounded.

Captain Somerville, 6th Maryland Regiment.
" Gibson, 5th do.
" Roun, Virginia State Artillery.
Lieut: Duvall, 3d Maryland Regiment.
" Sears, 2d do.
Ensign Fickle, 7th do.

Prisoners.

Lt. Col. Woolford, 5th Maryland Regiment—wounded.
Lt. Col. Vaughan, Delaware.
Lt. Col. Porterfield, Virginia State Regiment—wounded.
Lt. Col. Dubuysson, A. D. Camp Gen. de Kalb.
Major Winder, 1st Maryland Regiment.
Major Patton, Delaware Regiment.
Major Pinckney, A. D. Camp Gen. Gates—wounded.
Captains Brice, 3d Maryland Regiment.
Hoops, 4th do.
Lynch, 5th do.
Hamilton, 5th do.

* This date refers to the affair, in which the convoy, was recaptured from Sumpter.

Captain Hardman, 2d Maryland Regiment, wounded.
Smith, 3d do. do.
Dorsey, Artillery, do.
La Brune, Legion,* do.
Rhoads, Delaware Regiment.
Lamouth, do.
Captain-Lieut. Waters, Artillery.
Lieutenants Shoemaker, 4th Maryland Regiment, wounded.
Hanson, 4th do. do.
Read, 5th do. do.
Norris, 6th do. do.
Wallace, Artillery.
Foot, Legion.
Moseley, Artillery.
Duff, Delaware Regiment.
Shillington, do.
Lieut. & Adjt. Purvis, do.
Ensigns Burgiss, 4th Maryland Regiment.
" Roach, Delaware do.
Volunteers Nelson, 6th Maryland do. wounded.
Rutlidge, 4th do.

Missing.

Captain Morris, 7th Maryland Regiment—wounded.
Gassaway, 2d do.
Lieut. Gassaway, 2d do.
Captain Meredith, Artillery.
Captain-Lieut. Blair, do.

(Signed) O. H. Williams.

Hillsborough, August 29th, 1780.

* The Legion was commanded by Armand, and at the time, consisted of sixty horsemen and forty infantry.

NOTE B.

In March 1825, the remains of De Kalb, were exhumed from the grave, in which they were interred, after his death, at Camden. They were transported with due ceremonial, to the new tomb, prepared for them, and on which a monument has been erected, by the people of South Carolina.

Immediately over the grave, a stone slab was placed, having engraved on it. "This stone was placed over the remains of BARON DE KALB, by Gen. Lafayette, 1825." It had on it also, the words,—"Faedus" "Esto Perpetuum."

Over this was erected a white marble obelisk, with the following inscription:— "HERE lie the remains of BARON DE KALB, a German by birth, but in principle, a citizen of the world. His love of liberty induced him to leave the Old World, to aid the citizens of the New, in their struggle for INDEPENDENCE. His distinguished talents and many virtues, weighed with Congress, to appoint him MAJOR GENERAL in their REVOLUTIONARY ARMY. He was second in command in the battle fought near Camden, on the 16th of August, 1780, between the British and Americans, and there nobly fell, covered with wounds, while gallantly performing dêeds of valor, in rallying the friends, and opposing the enemies of his adopted country."

"In gratitude for his zeal and services, the citizens of South Carolina have erected this monument."

On that occasion, Gen. Lafayette said:—

"In that army, Sir, which offered a perfect assemblage of every civic and military virtue, Major General Baron De Kalb has acted a conspicuous part. His able conduct, undaunted valor, and glorious fall in the first battle of Camden, form one of the remarkable traits of our struggle for independence and freedom. He was cordially devoted to our American cause, and while his public and private qualities have endeared him to his cotemporaries, here I remain to pay to his merits on this tomb, the tribute of an admiring witness, of an intimate companion, of a mourning friend."

NOTE C.

Col. Nicholas Rogers of Baltimore, was an aide-de-camp of De Kalb, at Valley Forge, and on the line, from Elizabethtown to Amboy. When Gen. H. Lee was writing his Memoirs of the War, in the South, he applied to Col. Rogers, for such information, as he might possess, in regard to the Baron. Having been permitted to make extracts, from the Colonel's reply to Gen. Lee, they are now added, as of high value, coming from such a source. From the intimacy also, which usually exists, between a General and his aide, the best opportunity was presented to Col. Rogers, of gaining a clear insight into the character of his chief.

The reply is dated, New York, 24th January, 1810.

"My Dear Sir:—Respecting my good and old friend the Baron de Kalb, about whom we have formerly had some conversation, I wish I could give you such information as would contribute to make your intended publication as interesting as the world will naturally expect from your pen; but the long lapse of time and other circumstances, may probably, contrary to your expectations, render it rather scanty, however, such as it is, I am happy to place it at your service.

"In frequent conversations with him on the affairs of our country—then almost the only topic of conversation—he has repeatedly told me of his having been in this country between the years 1763 and 1765, in a concealed character,—as a German travelling for his pleasure.—This he did, from one end of the continent to the other; and, as I know him to have been an acute observer, he must have picked up a great deal of information for the French Court, by which, I have no doubt, he was expressly employed for that particular purpose.

"Speaking the English language well, and possessing the most conciliating and condescending manners, he had it in his power to insinuate himself everywhere, from the drawing-room down to the grog shop, and be assured that he culled from every group something appertaining to his mission, and marked well, in every countenance even, and conversation, the particular partialities and antipathies towards the two great leading nations of Europe, Great Britain and France. He often declared to me that such was the universal prepossession in favor of the former, and the almost instinctive hostility to the latter, that he sincerely believed and often said that nothing could have induced the Americans to have revolted against the mother country but the highly injudicious and short-sighted conduct

of the British ministry, whom he frequently ridiculed for their egregious folly in so wantonly casting off such an inestimable and powerful auxiliary.

"He has often told me that, in all his travels from North to South, he could find nobody of any consequence, either native or British, who did not think that Old England was the *ne plus ultra* and perfection of all human power.

"In the latter part of his residence amongst us, in his assumed character, he became, by some accident, suspected, was taken up, and was, I believe, put into prison for a few days. However, he soon made his way good and was released, for on examining his papers and baggage, nothing could be found to implicate him, because he never then kept, as he told me, anything like a manuscript trusting all to his memory, which I knew to be great. It was hardly possible to find a man more completely suited to such a mission. His wonderful sobriety and temperance at table being almost to excess and without example.

"In Europe, I believe, he was engaged chiefly in the Quarter Master Department, where, from his great aptitude for detail and minutiæ he must have been valuable. Had we have employed him in that line he might been of great service, for we frequently felt many inconveniences and suffered much from our ill-judged arrangement and want of foresight.

"Besides his extreme temperance, sobriety and prudence, with his great simplicity of manners which highly fitted him for his undertaking, he had also many of the other qualifications for a soldier, such as patience, long suffering, strength of constitution, endurance of hunger and thirst, and a cheerful submission to every inconvenience in lodging, for I have known him, repeatedly, to arrange his portmanteau as a pillow, and wrapping his great horseman's cloak around him stretch himself before the fire and take as comfortable a nap as if upon a bed of eider down. He would rise before day, light his candles and work till nine, then take a slice of dry bread with a glass of water, and go to work again until about twelve or one, when he would ride to Head Quarters, pick up the news of the day, and return to dinner. This meal consisted of a little soup and a shin of beef, or of a dry tasteless round, with his favorite beverage, water. After this he would go to work again, and so continue until dark, when without using his candle he would get to bed, that he might rise at the earliest hour in the morning. This was his mode of life generally, whilst we were at the Valley Forge, where we all suffered not a little.

"In size, he was a perfect Ariovistus, being upwards of six feet, and fully equal to the fatigues of a soldier. He would often walk twenty or thirty miles a day without sigh, or complaint, and indeed, often preferred

that exercise, to riding. His complexion and skin were remarkable, being as fair and fresh, as those of a youth.

"The observations and information of so judicious a person as Baron de Kalb, would help much to open our eyes to the conduct of the French Court, during our contest, particularly, during the early part of it, for, it was incomprehensible to us and to the world in general, why the French should be so long timidly hesitating, whether they should take an unequivocal part in our favor, when, apparently, there never was so good an opportunity offered to a rival nation, to injure an opponent, so eternally and deadly hostile."

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